

## Chapter 2: Planning Process

### 2 Documenting the Planning Process

Documentation of the planning process, including public involvement, is required to meet FEMA's DMA 2000 (44CFR§201.4(c)(1) and §201.6(c)(1)). This section includes a description of the planning process used to develop this plan, including how it was prepared, who was involved in the process, and how all of the involved agencies participated.

#### 2.1.1 Description of the Planning Process

The Minidoka County Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan was developed through a collaborative process involving all of the organizations and agencies detailed in Section 1.0 of this document. The County's local coordinator contacted these organizations directly to invite their participation and schedule meetings of the planning committee. The planning process included 5 distinct phases which were in some cases sequential (step 1 then step 2) and in some cases intermixed (step 4 completed though out the process):

1. **Collection of Data** about the extent and periodicity of wildfires in and around Minidoka County. This included an area encompassing Jerome, Cassia, Blaine, Lincoln, Twin Falls and Minidoka Counties to insure a robust dataset for making inferences about fires in Minidoka County specifically; this included a wildfire extent and ignition profile.
2. **Field Observations and Estimations** about wildfire risks including fuels assessments, juxtaposition of structures and infrastructure to wildland fuels, access, and potential treatments by wildfire specialists, rural fire chiefs and representatives of the BLM.
3. **Mapping** of data relevant to wildfire control and treatments, structures, resource values, infrastructure, fire prone landscapes, and related data.
4. **Facilitation of Public Involvement** from the formation of the planning committee, to a public mail survey, news releases, public meetings, public review of draft documents, and acceptance of the final plan by the signatory representatives.
5. **Analysis and Drafting of the Report** to integrate the results of the planning process, providing ample review and integration of committee and public input, followed by acceptance of the final document.

Planning efforts were led by the Project Director, Dr. William E. Schlosser, of Northwest Management, Inc. Dr. Schlosser holds 4 degrees in natural resource management (A.S. geology; B.S. forest and range management; M.S. natural resource economic & finance; Ph.D. environmental science and regional planning). Project Specialist John T. McGee led community and committee involvement efforts. Fire Management specialists Ken Homik and Dennis Thomas coordinated fire mitigation planning recommendations. Together, they led a team of resource professionals that included fire mitigation specialists, wildfire control specialists, resource management professionals, and hazard mitigation experts.

They were the point-people for team members to share data and information with during the plan's development. They and the planning team met with many residents of the county during the inspections of communities, infrastructure, and hazard abatement assessments. This methodology, when coupled with the other approaches in this process, worked effectively to integrate a wide spectrum of observations and interpretations about the project.

The planning philosophy employed in this project included the open and free sharing of information with interested parties. Information from federal and state agencies was integrated into the database of knowledge used in this project. Meetings with the committee were held throughout the planning process to facilitate a sharing of information between cooperators.

When the public meetings were held, many of the committee members were in attendance and shared their support and experiences with the planning process and their interpretations of the results.

## **2.2 Public Involvement**

Public involvement in this plan was made a priority from the inception of the project. There were a number of ways that public involvement was sought and facilitated. In some cases this led to members of the public providing information and seeking an active role in protecting their own homes and businesses, while in other cases it led to the public becoming more aware of the process without becoming directly involved in the planning process.

### **2.2.1 News Releases**

Under the auspices of the Minidoka County Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Planning Committee, news releases were submitted to the South Idaho Press and Minidoka County Newspaper. Press releases sent out to four area radio stations KSTA, KZDX, KKMV, KBAR.

#### **2.2.1.1 Radio Messages**

A short news release was aired over the KSTA, KZDX, and KKMV and KBAR radio stations the week of July 13, 2004 to announcing the goals of the planning committee, the purpose of the mitigation plan, the date and times of public meetings, and contact information.

#### **2.2.1.2 Public Postings**

Notice of the public meetings were posted in the County Courthouse in Rupert, the Heyburn City Hall, The city offices of Paul, and on the doors of the Heyburn City and West End Rural Fire Departments.

#### **2.2.1.3 Newspaper Articles**

Committee and public meeting announcements were submitted to the **South Idaho Press** and the **Minidoka County Newspaper**. A newspaper article ran on the front page of the South Idaho Press on August 10<sup>th</sup> entitled "Minidoka Fire Prevention Plan Nears Completion." The article outlined the intent of the plan as well as preliminary community assessments and mitigation recommendations for the county. The following is an example of one of the newspaper announcements that was submitted to the local newspaper.

# South Idaho Press

www.southidahopress.com

Tuesday, August 10, 2004

50¢ (home delivery 34¢)

## Minidoka fire prevention plan nears completion

By ROSE MARIE PARSONS  
South Idaho Press

RUPERT — Minidoka County's fire prevention plan which will be essential for approval of grants is nearing completion.

Representatives of Northwest Management, the Moscow consulting firm hired by the county to compile the wildland-urban interface mitigation plan, reported on their progress and presented a list of recommendations to the county commissioners Monday morning.

A survey was mailed July 20 to 240 county residents selected at random. Those who have not returned the survey will be mailed another copy today. The survey responses will be incorporated into the final fire prevention plan, said John McGee, Northwest Management resource advisor.

In addition to the random surveys, meetings will be held Aug. 24, 25 and 26 to gather public comment on the fire plan. The times and locations have not yet been determined.

The consulting company has toured the county to identify the vegetation patterns and to do an overall fuels assessment. It has also studied the history of fire calls throughout the county.

"The primary concern in the county stems from outlying areas where homes and ranches abut expanses of dry grass and rangeland fuels. The adjacency of wildland fuel to homes or farms can lead to economic or property loss... Generally speaking, the majority of homes in Minidoka County are at low risk to loss from wildfire due to well-planned road construction, gentle topography and isolation of existing native fuels in small islands. However, where homes on the outer

periphery of communities abut expanses of dry grass and rangeland fuels, the risk of loss to wildland fire is significantly greater," according to the report prepared for the county officials to review.

Rupert Fire Chief Larry Pool, Minidoka County Fire Protection District Chief Mike Brown and George Falkner, county disaster services director, reviewed a series of maps prepared by Northwest Management.

Areas where Bureau of Land Management property is adjacent to private agricultural land are a concern, said Dennis Thomas, owner of Northwest Management.

West End Fire District, which is bounded roughly by 400 South Road and 350 West Road, has had fires move in from BLM land, Brown said.

Not notifying the fire departments in advance about plans to do a controlled burn is a problem because it results in false alarms, Pool and Brown said.

In these cases, someone sees smoke and calls in a fire. Volunteer firefighters respond, only to find they have left work unnecessarily.

Brown and Pool are the only full time firefighters in the county. Randy Sutton, West End chief, and Terry Tracy, East End chief, have other jobs.

The potential for fires along tracks owned by the Eastern Idaho Railroad and by Northern Pacific Railroad are another area of concern.

Proving the cause of a fire along the railroad tracks can be difficult, Brown said.

The biggest need in building code enforcement is correct addressing. This is especially important for emergency medical responders, Brown said.

"You can usually find a fire by following the smoke," said Brown.



Ken Homik, Rupert Fire Chief Larry Pool, Disaster Services Director George Falkner, Minidoka County Fire Protection District Chief Mike Brown and Dennis Thomas examine the structure density map prepared by Northwest Management. Homik and Thomas met with the county officials on behalf of the company Monday to refine the maps.

### 2.2.2 Public Mail Survey

In order to collect a broad base of perceptions about wildland fire and individual risk factors of homeowners in Minidoka County, a mail survey was conducted. Using a state and county database of landowners in Minidoka County, homeowners from the Wildland-Urban Interface surrounding each community were identified. In order to be included in the database, individuals were selected that own property and have a dwelling in Minidoka County, as well as a mailing address in Minidoka County. This database created a list of unique names to which was affixed a random number that contributed to the probability of being selected for the public mail survey. A total of 240 landowners meeting the above criteria were selected.

The public mail survey developed for this project has been used in the past by Northwest Management, Inc., during the execution of other WUI Wildfire Mitigation Plans. The survey used The Total Design Method (Dillman 1978) as a model to schedule the timing and content of letters sent to the selected recipients. Copies of each cover letter, mail survey, and communication are included in Appendix III.

The first in the series of mailing was sent July 20, 2004, and included a cover letter, a survey, and an offer of receiving a custom GIS map of the area of their selection in Minidoka County if they would complete and return the survey. The free map incentive was tied into assisting their community and helping their interests by participating in this process. Each letter also informed residents about the planning process. A return self-addressed envelope was included in each packet. A postcard reminder was sent to the non-respondents on July 30, 2004, encouraging their response. A final mailing, with a revised cover letter pleading with them to participate, was sent to non-respondents on August 10, 2004.

Surveys were returned during the months of July and August. A total of 117 residents responded to the survey (as of September 16, 2004 – *this will be updated until the final plan is completed*). No surveys were returned as undeliverable, and two responded that they no longer live in the area. The effective response rate for this survey was 46% (*to date*). Statistically, this response rate allows the interpretation of all of the response variables significantly at the 99% confidence level.

### 2.2.2.1 Survey Results

A summary of the survey's results will be presented here and then referred back to during the ensuing discussions on the need for various treatments, education, and other information. *Survey information will be updated until the completion of the plan.*

Of the survey respondents, 88% have a home within Minidoka County and consider this home as their primary residence. About 10% of the respondents were from the Acequia area, 18% were from the Heyburn-Burly area, 1% was from the Minidoka area, 3% were from the Norland Area, 20% were from the Paul area, and 37% were from the Rupert area.

Ninety-eight percent of the respondents correctly identified that they have emergency telephone 911 services in their area. Ninety seven percent of the respondents correctly identified that they have structural fire protection, while the remaining 3% identified that they did not have any structural protection. All of these respondents did indeed have structural protection when they thought that they were in an unprotected area.

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of roofing material covering the main structure of their home. Approximately 57% of respondents indicated their homes were covered with a composite material (asphalt shingles). About 3% indicated their home were covered with a metal (eg., aluminum, tin) roofing material. Roughly 15% of the respondents indicated they have a wooden roofing material such as shakes or shingles. Three percent of the respondents indicated that they have a ceramic tile roof, and 24% did not indicate what types of roofing material they had.

Residents were asked to evaluate the proximity of brush within certain distances of their homes. Often, the density of brush around a home is an indicator of increased fire risk. The results are presented in Table 2.1

**Table 2.1 Survey responses indicating the proximity of brush to homes.**

<b>% area in brush</b>	<b>Within 250 feet of your home</b>	<b>Within 75 feet of your home</b>
No brush	76%	84%
Less than 10% of area	13%	9%
Between 10% and 25%	7%	6%
More than 25% of area	4%	2%



Ninety nine percent of those returning the survey indicated they have a lawn surrounding their home. Of these individual home sites, 97% indicated they keep this lawn green through the fire season.

The average driveway length of the respondents was approximately 295 feet long, from their main road to their parking area. Only 4% of the respondents had a driveway over  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile long, with no respondents indicating driveways longer than  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. Of these homes with driveways  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile or more in length, roughly 56% have turnouts allowing two vehicles to pass each other in the case of an emergency. Sixteen percent of the respondents indicate that they have a bridge accessing their property. Of these, 84% indicated that the bridge was adequate to support a heavy fire engine. Approximately 61% of all homeowners indicated they have an alternative escape route, with the remaining 39% indicating only one-way-in and one-way-out.

Nearly all respondents (99%) indicated they have some type of tools to use against a wildfire that threatens their home. Table 2.2 summarizes these responses.

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**Table 2.2. Percent of homes with indicated fire fighting tools in Minidoka County.**

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95% – Hand tools (shovel, Pulaski, etc.)

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9% – Portable water tank

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9% – Stationery water tank

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37% – Pond, lake, or stream water supply close

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16% – Water pump and fire hose

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25% – Equipment suitable for creating fire breaks (bulldozer, cat, skidder, etc.)

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Roughly 10% of the respondents in Minidoka County indicated they have someone in their household trained in wildland fire fighting. Approximately 8% indicated someone in the household had been trained in structural fire fighting. However, it is important to note that these questions did not specify a standard nor did it refer to how long ago the training was received.

A couple of questions ask whether homeowners conduct periodic fire mitigation efforts on their property. Respondents were asked if they conduct a periodic fuels reduction program near their home sites, such as grass or brush burning. Fifty six percent of the respondents indicate that they periodically burn or mow grass and brush in the vicinity of their home. Forty-eight percent responded that livestock (cattle, horses, sheep) graze the grasses and forbs around their home sites.

Respondents were asked to complete a fuel hazard rating worksheet to assess their home's fire risk rating. An additional column titled "results" has been added to the table, showing the percent of respondents circling each rating (Table 2.3).

Circle the ratings in each category that best describes your home.

Table 2.3. Fuel Hazard Rating Worksheet		Rating	Results
Fuel Hazard	Small, light fuels (grasses, forbs, weeds, shrubs)	1	73%
	Medium size fuels (brush, large shrubs, small trees)	2	17%
	Heavy, large fuels (woodlands, timber, heavy brush)	3	6%
Slope Hazard	Mild slopes (0-5%)	1	88%
	Moderate slope (6-20%)	2	6%
	Steep Slopes (21-40%)	3	6%
	Extreme slopes (41% and greater)	4	1%
Structure Hazard	Noncombustible roof and noncombustible siding materials	1	41%
	Noncombustible roof and combustible siding material	3	14%
	Combustible roof and noncombustible siding material	7	28%
	Combustible roof and combustible siding materials	10	12%
Additional Factors	Rough topography that contains several steep canyons or ridges	+2	Average -2.3 pts
	Areas having history of higher than average fire occurrence	+3	
	Areas exposed to severe fire weather and strong winds	+4	
	Areas with existing fuel modifications or usable fire breaks	-3	
	Areas with local facilities (water systems, rural fire districts, dozers)	-3	

#### Calculating your risk

Values below are the average response value to each question.

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 \text{Fuel hazard} & \underline{1.3} & \times \text{Slope Hazard } \underline{1} = \underline{2.3} \\
 \text{Structural hazard} & + & \underline{4.3} \\
 \text{Additional factors} & (+ \text{ or } -) & \underline{-2.3} \\
 \text{Total Hazard Points} & = & \underline{4.3}
 \end{array}$$

**Table 2.4. Percent of respondents in each risk category as determined by the survey respondents.**

00% – Extreme Risk = 26 + points
05% – High Risk = 16–25 points
21% – Moderate Risk = 7–15 points
68% – Low Risk = 6 or less points

Maximum household rating form score was 24 points, as assessed by the homeowners. These numbers were compared to observations made by field crews trained in wildland fire fighting.

These results indicate that for the most part, these indications are only slightly lower than the risk rating assigned by the “professionals”.

Finally, respondents were asked “if offered in your area, would members of your household attend a free, or low cost, one-day training seminar designed to teach homeowners in the wildland–urban interface how to improve the defensible space surrounding your home and adjacent outbuildings?” Approximately 46% of the respondents indicated a desire to participate in this type of training.

Homeowners were also asked, “How do you feel Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Mitigation projects should be funded in the areas surrounding homes, communities, and infrastructure such as power lines and major roads?” Responses are summarized in Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5. Public Opinion of Wildfire Mitigation Funding Preferences.**

	Mark the box that best applies to your preference		
	100% Public Funding	Cost-Share (Public & Private)	Privately Funded (Owner or Company)
<b>Home Defensibility Projects</b>	24%	36%	38%
<b>Community Defensibility Projects</b>	58%	33%	6%
<b>Infrastructure Projects Roads, Bridges, Power Lines, Etc.</b>	70%	12%	15%

## 2.2.3 Committee Meetings

The following list of people who participated in the planning committee meetings, volunteered time, or responded to elements of the Minidoka County Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan’s preparation.

- Dan Stapelman .....Minidoka County Commissioner
- Dave Teeter .....Minidoka County Commissioner
- Marvin Bingham .....Minidoka County Commissioner
- Duane Smith .....Minidoka County Clerk
- George Falkner .....Minidoka County Disaster Coordinator
- Curtis Jensen .....Bureau of Land Management
- Julie Thomas.....Mid-Snake RC&D
- John McGee.....Northwest Management, Inc.
- Larry V. Pool .....Rupert City Fire and Rescue
- Mike Brown .....Minidoka County Fire Protection District
- Paul E. Fries Sr. ....Minidoka County Sheriff
- Randy Sutton .....West End Fire Protection District
- Rose Marie Parsons.....South Idaho Press
- Dennis S. Thomas.....Northwest Management, Inc.

- John McGee.....Northwest Management, Inc.
- Ken Homik.....Northwest Management, Inc.
- Toby Brown .....Northwest Management, Inc.
- William E. Schlosser .....Northwest Management, Inc.

Committee Meetings were scheduled and held on the following dates:

### **March 8, 2004**

John McGee opened the meeting with introductions and an overview of the planning process. He also discussed specific information that members of the committee would have to provide to develop a complete mitigation plan. Contact information was exchanged between the committee members.

- **Schedule of Meetings:** NMI would like to hold one meeting each month until the conclusion of the planning process. The second Monday of every month at 11 am was approved by the committee. (April 12, May 10, etc.) The location of the meetings will change due to the availability of meeting rooms.
- **Map Products:** NMI developed several GIS maps showing landowners, fire districts, past fires, and fire prone landscapes. The committee reviewed these maps and made corrections. NMI will update the maps for the next meeting. The committee was asked to provide any additional GIS information that may be available to Dr. Schlosser.
- **Resources and Capabilities Guide:** John explained the type of information that needed to be included in the survey handed out to all of the fire districts. This information will be made into a booklet including 8 ½ by 11 district maps. This will become a summary of available resources that all emergency response agencies will have a copy of.
- **Fire Risk Assessments:** NMI personnel has made site visits to all of the identified communities in Minidoka County. A summary of observations about the fuels in each community, the access, and potential mitigation treatments will be handed out hopefully at the next meeting. If any of the committee members has past, current, or future fire mitigation projects planned, please provide this information to either directly to John or NMI.
- **Public Involvement:** John explained the importance of public involvement to the planning process. Committee members were encouraged to invite interested community members to the meetings. The public surveys will be sent out in the next few weeks to gather feedback from residents. The County Assessor's office is supposed to provide a mailing list. Public meetings will also be held to share information and facilitate public input. The committee will be the first to review the draft document, then it goes out for public review. County Commissioners will have the final approval.

### **April 12, 2004-**

Curtis Jensen explained the importance of fund for mitigation and how the plan can be used to show the need for that money in Minidoka County.

Group asked questions about the makeup of the public survey and asked about changes on the maps.

West End asked how the info. would be monitored, ie a farmer on the edge of the WUI.



Curtis said that it would be handled during the implementation agreement and the biggest hurdle now is getting the plan written

Equipment—West Side needs trucks, in conjunction with the new BLM station, could help reduce fire insurance rates, possible to have near HWY 24

Mike Brown talked about recruitment and retention—very costly, liability issues, too many things that people can now do with their time. BLM does not do structural training academy, many states do

Communications—Curtis talked about homeland security issues and narrow band digital, volunteers can, have the capability currently with analog

Water—need more tenders and systems county wide, Comm. Bingham asked who had fire protection for the Youth Ranch—Mike Brown said it is under his agency

### **July 29, 2004**

Ken Homik from NMI toured the Minidoka County Fire Protection District with Curtis Jensen from the BLM and Mike Brown, Chief of the district. Tour highlighted problem areas within the district and included productive discussions of fire-related issues facing Minidoka County FPD and the county at large.

### **August 9, 2004**

John McGee opened the meeting with introductions and a synopsis of the public survey mailing and the distribution of press releases to area newspapers and radio stations.

Ken Homik and Dennis Thomas from NMI updated the committee on revisions to the community assessments for Minidoka County. Homik and Thomas then presented a list of potential mitigation items that had been developed from past committee meetings as well as from discussions with representatives from the local fire districts. The committee reviewed the list and comments and suggestions for modifications were made.

Resources and capabilities for all the districts had been received and were being incorporated into the plan. Resource needs were identified by district and would be integrated into the plan.

Review of critical infrastructure, fire districts boundaries and WUI maps were completed by fire chiefs. Discussion of other assessment tools such as condition class, fire severity and fire prone landscapes were held.

Thomas and Homik spend three hours with Rupert Fire Chief Larry Pool, Disaster Services Director George Falkner, and Minidoka County Fire Chief Mike Brown discussing fire-related issues facing Minidoka County.

### **August 10, 2004**

Ken Homik and Dennis Thomas from NMI toured the West End Fire District with Fire Chief Randy Sutton. The tour of district boundaries and priority areas was preceded by a lengthy discussion of fire issues within the district as well as review of infrastructure and WUI maps at the station.

### **September 13, 2004**

John McGee opened the meeting with an update of FMP activities to date. The public meetings held on August 23-25 were discussed, as were survey response rates. The bulk of the meeting was spent reviewing the draft version of the FMP. Ken Homik outlined the structure and format of the plan. Discussion centered on the recommendations and activities outlined in Chapter 5 of the plan. Each action was visited with discussion on points that needed

clarification. At the conclusion of the meeting, a time frame for completion and the next steps in the planning process were discussed. Committee members agreed to get all additional comments to NMI by September 17 for incorporation into the plan before the draft plan is released for public review. The county fire chiefs and Ken Homik met after the meeting for further clarification and review of community assessments and action items.

## **2.2.4 Public Meetings**

Public information meetings were held on August 24, 2004 in Paul, August 15, 2004 in Rupert, and August 26, 2004 in Heyburn, Idaho. The purpose of these meetings was to share information on the planning process with a broadly representative cross section of Minidoka County landowners. All meetings had wall maps posted in the meeting rooms with many of the analysis results summarized specifically for the risk assessments, location of structures, fire protection, and related information.

Attendance at the public meetings included eight individuals at Paul, five at the meeting in Rupert, and five at the meeting in Heyburn.

### **2.2.4.1.1 Paul Public Meeting**

August 24, West End Fire Hall- 7:00 to 9:00 PM

### **2.2.4.1.2 Rupert Public Meeting**

August 25, 2004 – Rupert City Fire Department

### **2.2.4.1.3 Heyburn Public Meeting**

August 26, 2004 – Heyburn Fire Station- 7:00 to 9:00 PM

### **2.2.4.1.4 Meeting Notices**

Public notices of these meetings were submitted to the **South Idaho Press** and the **Minidoka County Newspaper**. The notices were asked to run from August 13 to August 27, 2004.

### **Minidoka County Wildland Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan**

The public is invited to attend meetings and provide input concerning in the Minidoka County Fire Mitigation Plan. The Plan includes risk analysis at the community level with predictive models for where fires are likely to ignite and where they are likely to spread rapidly once ignited. The committee involved includes rural and wildland fire districts, land managers, elected officials, agency representatives, and others.

For more information on the Fire Mitigation Plan or if you have questions contact Northwest Management, Inc. project managers William Schlosser or Dennis Thomas at (208) 883-4488, the Minidoka local coordinator John McGee at (208) 459-8404, or your County Commissioner.

Meeting dates and locations are listed below:

**August 24, 2004** 7 PM to 9 PM

Paul City Fire Hall

152 S. 600 W

**August 25, 2004** 7 PM to 9 PM

Rupert City Fire Hall

620 F Street

**August 26, 2004** 7 PM to 9 PM

Heyburn Fire Station

901 18<sup>th</sup> Street

### ***2.3 Review of the WUI Wildfire Mitigation Plan***

Reviews of sections of this document were conducted by the planning committee during the planning process as maps, summaries, written assessments and mitigation recommendations were completed. These individuals included fire mitigation specialists, fire chiefs, planners, elected officials, BLM representatives and others involved in the coordination process. Preliminary findings were discussed and comments were collected and integrated into the plan.

Public Review of this document was sought from September 21 through October 8, 2004. Written comments, changes, ideas, and suggestions for inclusion were incorporated into the final plan.

The completed plan was adopted by the County Commissioners on October 18, 2004.